

Part 1. About the tools

Most ACAS assessment tools are designed for on-job assessment over an extended period, even if students studied in classes or are RPL students. They have the following parts:

- *A beginning section.* It has a brief subject title, the official code and title, and the purpose of the unit.
- *How you will be assessed,* containing the unit's conditions of assessment, and required evidence. Besides the interview, two kinds of evidence are normally required for all competency requirements: workplace observation (including participation in staff meetings) and naturally-occurring workplace documents.
- *Interview or assignment questions.* These represent the unit's required knowledge.
- *Detailed requirements,* representing the elements and performance criteria. They have been re-written to make them easier to understand and to apply.

Part 2. Assessing required knowledge

This assessment usually asks students to recall information from either the textbook or their workplace. Only one assessment is sufficient as long as students answer all questions satisfactorily. (The normal requirement for multiple kinds of evidence applies only to competence, not required knowledge.)

If you use an interview, encourage students to use prepared notes, but don't let them simply read from them.

If you use the questions in a written form (e.g. written assignment), check that you don't need to rewrite them. You might want to add probing questions and seek examples.

Part 3. Reliability

Most student responses in lower qualifications can be predetermined because students are usually required to follow procedures. A guide might be helpful.

Higher level qualifications, however, often require students to respond to a specific kind of context and create an original response. The criteria are very useful, but students' solutions can seldom be predetermined. The guiding principle is "appropriate to context."

Part 4. If in doubt ...

If a student response is borderline, you should:

- confer with a second assessor or expert so that your assessments are consistent and reliable.
- keep a record of various kinds of answers in order to improve the standard of assessment.

Part 5. Confidentiality

Many workplace documents are confidential. The simplest way to handle confidentiality is for an internal employee to get qualified as an assessor and do assessments. Otherwise documents must be made anonymous.

Retaining evidence is more difficult if you may not take it away. Check you can still have access to it if you necessary.

Part 6. Interviewing

The instructions below refer to the interview relating to competence. This is different from knowledge, because more evidence is required.

1. *Before the interview.* Read through the questions and requirements in the unit description. The system is transparent when both assessors and students follow the same list of questions. You must cover *all* interview questions and check *all* requirements.

2. *At the interview, help students to feel relaxed.* The assessment is actually an oral test, but the term "interview" is perhaps less intimidating.

People are less nervous in familiar surroundings. It often works well if students start by showing you around their workplace and what they do. They might answer many questions that you intended to ask later.

If they are submitting a portfolio, let them show you through it and talk about what they did. Again, they might answer many of your questions.

3. *You don't need to ask questions twice.* When students answer a question, they often answer many questions that are intended to come up later. You don't need to ask a question again if the student has already answered it satisfactorily. For example, you'll sometimes find the same requirements in multiple units.

If a knowledge item is clearly apparent in the student's performance and you have already assessed it that way, you don't need to assess it again. Otherwise, you need to discuss it separately in the interview.

4. *You may probe with any necessary follow-up questions.* You need to determine whether students have met all requirements:

- a. have the related knowledge
- b. know how to perform the competencies
- c. have actually done so.

If the student only gives you memorized information or explains theory (e.g. from the textbook), ask follow-up questions of application. If they still don't know, you must lean toward a result of "not yet competent."

Many questions will naturally arise from the student's evidence. Feel free to ask suitable questions: "Why did you do it this way?" You can also use the elements and criteria to create extra questions.

5. *Keep written records.* You should also keep notes on how we could improve our questions.

6. *Student performance should comply with other relevant standards.* (E.g. legislation, WHS.)

7. *Your interview should corroborate other evidence that the student has submitted.* For example, they should be able to explain the work in their portfolio.

8. *What if a student can't answer or gets an answer wrong?* Perhaps their nervousness is making them forgetful or to get stuck. You can:

- Re-phrase the question.
- Talk the student around in a circle so that you can ask again.
- Ask a simpler question and build back up to the question you wanted to ask.
- Break your question into a series of smaller, simpler questions. (And consider revising the question to make it clearer.)
- If they really don't know, leave it, mark it "unsatisfactory," and move on. Don't embarrass them.
- People who learn on the job think differently from "book learners." If they can't answer a bookish question, ask what they'd do in a situation that requires that knowledge.

Hints

- Avoid unnecessarily making the student feel interrogated.
- Remember, questioning is a skill. You will learn to ask better questions with practice.

Part 5: Interview guide

The questions below are worded so that you can probably use them exactly as written.

1. *Describe what you have done.* Show me around and describe what you do. You may tell it as a story if it helps.

2. *Explain how you did it.*

- a. How did you do it? What steps or stages did you follow?
- b. Why did you do it the way you did?
- c. In your experience, what are the main principles that you need to apply to be successful in what you did?

3. *Evaluate.*

- a. What were the major decisions you had to make? Which options did you take and why?
- b. In what situations would you need to do it another way from the way you did it?
- c. How would you respond to the main alternative viewpoints to your own? (Give examples.)
- d. What did you do well?
- e. What did you do not so well?
- f. What would you do differently next time?

4. *Manage yourself and your tasks.*

- a. How does your schedule work?
- b. How do you plan your work?
- c. What kinds of improvements have you thought about?
- d. How do you go getting people or equipment organized?
- e. How do you keep your paperwork under control?

5. *Getting it right when things go wrong.*

- a. What kinds of things most often go wrong when doing this work?
- b. What are the signs of it becoming a real problem, not just a potential problem? How do you respond to each problem? When would you try other ways of fixing it?
- c. If you depend on others to get their job done correctly, what would you do if they made a mistake?
- d. What would you do if your equipment broke down?

End